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CLAIMS

1.   A communications method comprising the steps of:-
        receiving a voice message containing an utterance;
5   buffering the received message;
        performing a speech recognition process on the received voice message to
recognise the utterance contained therein;
        determining, if possible, an intended receiver of the message in dependence on
the recognised utterance; and
10   if an intended receiver was determined, transmitting the message to the
determined intended receiver using a half-duplex communications service provided by a
packet-switched network.

2.   A method according to claim 1, wherein when the determining step determines
15 one or more possible intended receivers from the recognised utterance, the method
further comprises the steps:
        indicating the one or more possible intended receivers to a user; and
        receiving a selection signal from the user indicating the one or more determined
possible intended receivers to which the message should be transmitted.
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3.   A method according to claim 2, wherein the indicating step further comprises
generating an audio speech prompt corresponding to the one or more possible intended
receivers; and outputting the generated audio speech prompt to the user.

25 4.   A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein when the
determining step determines a plurality of intended receivers, the message is transmitted
to each of the determined receivers using a group call function of the half-duplex
communications service.

30 5.   A method according to any of the preceding claims, wherein the speech
recognition process is performed only on a portion of the received voice message.

6.   A method according to any of the preceding claims, and further comprising the
steps of: receiving an indication of the identity of a user who generated the message; and

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selecting a user-dependent speech grammar for use by the speech recognition process in dependence on the identity of the user.

7.   A method according to any of the preceding claims, and further comprising the steps of receiving a speech recognition activation signal from a user, wherein the speech recognition and determining steps are performed in dependence on the receipt of such a signal.

8.   A method according to any of the preceding claims, and further comprising the steps of: monitoring messages transported by the half-duplex communications service; performing a speech recognition process on the monitored messages to determine the respective utterances contained therein; and, if it is determined that a predetermined utterance is contained in any of the messages, signalling that the half-duplex communications service should cease transporting messages.

9.   A computer program or suite of computer programs arranged such that when executed by a computer system it/they cause the computer program to perform the method of any of the preceding claims.

10.   A computer readable storage medium storing a computer program or any one or more of a suite of computer programs according to claim 9.

11.   A communications system comprising:-
        means for receiving a voice message containing an utterance;
        storage means for buffering the received message;
        a speech recogniser arranged in use to recognise the utterance contained within the received message;
        receiver determination means arranged to determine, if possible, an intended receiver of the message in dependence on the recognised utterance; and
        means for transmitting the message to a determined intended receiver using a half-duplex communications service provided by a packet-switched network, if the intended receiver was determined.

12.   A system according to claim 11, and further comprising:

indicating means for indicating one or more possible determined intended receivers to a user; and

means for receiving a selection signal from the user indicating one or more of the possible determined intended receivers to which the message should be transmitted.

13.   A system according to claim 12, wherein the indicating means further comprises audio prompt generating means for generating an audio speech prompt corresponding to the one or more of possible intended receivers; and an output for outputting the generated audio speech prompt to the user.

14.   A system according to any of claims 11 to 13, wherein when the receiver determination means determines a plurality of intended receivers, the means for transmitting is further arranged to transmit the message to each of the determined receivers using a group call function of the half-duplex communications service.

15.   A system according to any of claims 11 to 14, wherein the speech recogniser operates only on a portion of the received voice message.

16.   A system according to any of claims 11 to 15, and further comprising: means for receiving an indication of the identity of a user who generated the message ; and grammar selection means for selecting a user-dependent speech grammar for use by the speech recognition process in dependence on the identity of the user.

17.   A system according to any of claims 11 to 16, and further comprising the steps of means for receiving a speech recognition activation signal from a user, wherein the speech recogniser and receiver determination means are operable in dependence on the receipt of such a signal.

18.   A system according to any of claims 11 to 17, and further comprising: means for monitoring messages transported by the half-duplex communications service; the speech recogniser being further arranged to perform a speech recognition process on the monitored messages to determine the respective utterances contained therein; the system further comprising signalling means for signalling that the half-duplex communications

service should cease transporting messages, if it is determined that a predetermined utterance is contained in any of the messages.